

Post Course External Review of MSC's Bushcraft and Risk Management Course

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people who chose to take part in this follow up review and took the time to share their observations about the MSC course they attended and how this has impacted on their practices in the outdoors.

Reviewer biography

Dr Robyn Zink has extensive experience teaching and researching in the areas of outdoor recreation and outdoor education in New Zealand and overseas. She was brought in as an independent reviewer to undertake the *Evaluation of Educational Programmes (2010)*, which is one component of a larger, on-going programme review project being undertaken by MSC. The participants from the courses reviewed in 2010 gave very positive responses to the experiences they had on the course and at the time identified a range of skills and knowledge they felt would contribute to their safety in the outdoors. MSC were curious as to if and how participants applied their learning. Dr Zink was engaged for this second review as she was familiar with the context of the courses the participants had done and already had had extensive conversations with the participants about their experiences in the outdoors, their motivations for undertaking the course and what they hoped they would gain from it. At the time of these studies Dr Zink had no affiliation with MSC. Subsequent to this second study she has joined the MSC education committee, which provides advice to MSC on educational matters.

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1. Executive summary

This project is a follow up to the 2010 *Educational Programme Evaluation Report* (Zink, 2010) and this report should be read in conjunction with the 2010 report. The terms of reference for this project were:

- Do MSC training attendees feel that they are now safer due to training?
- Is MSC training high quality education / training?

Data was gathered through telephone interviews with ten of the participants from the four MSC courses observed for the 2010 study. The aim was to ascertain if the participants from these courses did now feel safer in the outdoors and if and how they applied the skills and knowledge they had acquired on the course. The participants were also asked how their learning experience could have been improved. The reviewer asked specific questions about their experiences of review and assessment in the courses as these were identified as gaps in the 2010 report. The findings present a snapshot of MSC courses and it is not possible to ascertain how common the experiences of these ten people are with others that attend MSC courses. The recommendations made in this report support the recommendations made in the 2010 report.

1.1 Summary of findings

Do MSC training attendees feel that they are now safer due to the training?

- All training attendees reported feeling more confident in the outdoors now and could all identify specific changes in practices and / or attitudes due to the course.
- Training attendees described an increased level of awareness in their roles. This included an increased level of vigilance in their planning and their practice and a greater understanding of their leadership role.
- The applied nature of courses, examples and shared experiences were identified as facilitating understanding and the application of course material into personal practice.
- The ability to communicate clearly within organisations, with other leaders, and with their own participants was identified by training attendees as an important component of their current safety practices.
- Increased confidence allowed training attendees to focus more on their students / participants and the places they were in.

Is MSC training high quality education /training?

- All training attendees thought the instructors were excellent and the way they shared their extensive experience enhanced the learning experience.
- Participants felt confident they had understood the material covered in the courses, but also noted they had some difficulty remembering all of the things that had been covered in the courses.
- More review and feedback would aid learning.

1.2 Recommendations

Do MSC training attendees feel that they are now safer due to the training?

- On-going clarification of the safety messages MSC sees as a priority.
- Utilise more review and formative assessment activities during courses to enhance feedback participants receive about their understanding of skills and concepts and to help identify future learning needs.
- Utilise short activities that require participants to relate a specific skill or concept to their context.
- Review pre and post course reference material to ensure it supports training attendees to apply skills and knowledge from courses in their own practice.
- Promote further MSC courses to participants as a way to develop their knowledge and skills.

Is MSC training high quality education /training?

- Provide training for instructors on review and formative assessment processes.
- Provide training for instructors to enable training attendees to clearly communicate safety issues to the participants in their own groups.
- Develop on-line and / or paper resources to support courses, including pre-course activities, refresher activities and reference material participants can refer to as they apply their understandings from courses to specific contexts.

1.3 Areas for further investigation

An area that deserves further investigation is around the question of assessment. In the 2010 report the reviewer suggested there was a case for summative forms of assessment. This provides training attendees with a clear understanding of their skill level (this was thought to be particularly pertinent for those in the Outdoor Leader programme), and gives MSC evidence which is seen as credible to support the claims made about course outcomes. Yet participants in this study were concerned that assessment might have a negative impact on learning. Any forms of assessment introduced into the programmes require careful consideration so it contributes to a positive learning experience and to participants' confidence in the outdoors. It also needs to be supported with appropriate training for trainers.

2. Report Context

The purpose of this follow-up study was to investigate the longer term impact of MSC training and the transfer of learning from courses to participants' own practice. Based on the findings from the 2010 study, the main focus was on what, if anything participants remembered from the course, how easy it was for them to apply that learning to their specific context and anything that would have improved the learning experience, including a particular focus on review, feedback and assessment.

This follow up project flows out of the 2010 *Educational Programme Evaluation Report*, also conducted by the author of this study, which included two Basic Bushcraft courses and two Risk Management courses. These courses were randomly chosen by the reviewer. The follow up study occurred approximately six months after the MSC courses.

The 2010 programme evaluation project set out to address the following questions:

1. Is MSC education / training high quality?
2. Are MSC messages being delivered well?
3. Is the component of MSC's Outcomes Model which relates to "Quality education / training" credible as a model for how MSC's educational / training process should be operating?

The 2010 report used all of the 'Quality education / training (where necessary) on sufficient subjects' section of the Outcomes Model as a framework to answer questions one and two above (See appendix One). This follow-up study has a narrower focus and is only concerned with specific parts of this section of the outcomes model. Related to the first term of reference: Do MSC training attendees feel that they are now safer due to the training?, these are:

- Trainees aware of safety messages
- Trainees understand safety messages
- Trainees fully apply safety messages to themselves
- Trainees know their limits and seek further knowledge and skills where necessary

Related to the second term of reference for this study: Is MSC training high quality education/training? The focus of this project was:

- Effective training resources produced
- Quality trainers / instructors
- Appropriate training channels and methods used.
- Courses delivered well with appropriate content to meet trainees' needs.

The findings from the 2010 study suggested that participants were satisfied with the training experience they had. The key messages or main things they were taking from the respective courses were in line with the key messages the instructors aimed to deliver. They all left the courses feeling that they had acquired relevant skills and knowledge. The participants on the bushcraft courses all felt more confident about going into the bush. The participants on the Risk Management courses were somewhat more mixed in their response at the end of the course. While they felt they had learnt some useful things, a number did not feel more confident about being in the outdoors. This seemed to be largely related to the realisation of how quickly things can change in the outdoors and the level of responsibility they have when leading a group.

On the whole the participants had been very happy with the level of instruction they received on the courses. They liked that the courses all had significant practical components that allowed them to apply the skills and concepts as they were introduced. Participants on the risk management courses, which have a much greater theory component, liked the range of teaching resources used, with video, overheads and various activities. Participants all felt that the instructors were very

experienced and knowledgeable. They valued the stories that instructors and other participants related about their various experiences in the outdoors.

One of the issues identified in the 2010 project is an apparent lack of clarity or consistency in the key messages MSC want delivered with both the Bushcraft and the Risk Management courses. Two gaps in the current teaching practices on the MSC courses observed were the limited opportunities made available to training attendees to review material covered and the lack of assessment practices. On both the Risk Management and the Bushcraft courses participants noted during the course that a lot of material was covered. Specific feedback from two of the Risk Management participants suggested they would have appreciated some forms of review, for example through a short quiz, and the opportunity to apply the concepts to their specific situation. Review and assessment were raised as issues by the project reviewer as the adult education literature suggests that review or reflection are central to the process of making sense of new information (Beard & Wilson, 2006). Review, or the sense making process, appears to facilitate the transfer of learning across to other contexts.

The issue of assessment was raised by the reviewer in the 2010 report. As noted in that report:

“when asked about assessment processes the instructors talked about this largely being an intuitive process where they made judgements about how people were responding or demonstrating a skill. Only on one of the risk management courses did the instructor sum up the ideas or concepts covered at the end of each day and asked participants if they could explain them. As people take these courses for professional reasons, and they contribute to the Outdoor Leader qualification there is some justification for some forms of assessment and giving instructors skills and tools to enable them to collect evidence of achievement, particularly for those doing Outdoor Leader. (Zink, 2010,p. 27).”

Assessment here is defined as an inquiry-based process teachers use in order to make informed decisions about teaching and learning.

3. Literature Review

As noted in the *Educational Programme Evaluation Report (2010)* the adult education literature provides a useful reference point for MSC to help understand the educational programmes they are offering. Two pertinent points from that literature in relation to this report are related to what makes for a good quality learning experience and the ability of participants to transfer what they learn on the courses to the context in which they will use the skills and knowledge.

There are many reasons adults engage in learning, they tend to be self-directed learners and they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience with them. A focus just on skills or knowledge in the teaching process in adult education tends to be inadequate as adult learners require an holistic approach that attends to their social, emotional and cognitive needs. As Leberman and Martin (2004) note, learning is not confined to a course but may increase after an event as participants have time to engage with the material covered and the pedagogical processes they experienced during an event.

There are many theories related to how transfer of learning can be facilitated even though a detailed understanding of the process is still lacking (Leberman, McDonald & Doyle, 2006). Bransford (2000, cited in Leberman, et al., 2006) notes that “time spent on gaining understanding has consequences for transfer, which is different from time spent on rote learning or memorisation” (p. 29). This reviewer is working with an assumption that learning is more than acquiring knowledge that the learner can then ‘download’ when needed. Learning is understood to mean “the ability to successfully interact in society” (Brown, 2010, p. 17), which requires understanding a concept or skill, and understanding contexts in which that concept or skill might be applicable.

Reflection or review is central to the sense making that can lead to understanding. Assessment may also have a role to play in the review or reflection process facilitating understanding in MSC courses. Much has been written on assessment. Assessment can be about measuring what learners know [summative assessment] and it can be about “making learning visible and finding out what learners can do [formative assessment]” (Latham, 2006, p. 264). Whereas summative assessment tends to occur at the end of the learning process, formative assessment takes place as the learning happens, gives students feedback on their progress with the aim of facilitating learning and understanding, and is forward looking to learning that will happen in the future (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2007). Formative assessment provides opportunities for teachers and learners to consider progress toward a learning goal and is accompanied by meaningful feedback. The difference can be summed up as assessment *for* learning (formative) rather than assessment *of* learning (summative) (Serafini, 2000-01, cited in Latham, 2006).

4. Method of information gathering for the follow up evaluation

The participants from the two Bushcraft courses and the two Risk Management courses observed by the reviewer in 2010 were contacted by MSC with a request to take part in this follow up study (See letter appendix Two). This occurred approximately six months after they had attended a course.

Phone interviews were conducted with the participants over the period from 28 April to 8 May 2011. The interviews lasted between ten minutes and 25 minutes, with most being about fifteen minutes (See appendix Three for interview schedule). These were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The reviewer identified common themes to emerge from the interview data.

4.1 The study participants

Ten people were interviewed in this study. This was half of the participants who attended the Risk Management and Bushcraft courses in 2010. Of the thirteen people who had participated in the two Risk Management courses, eight said they would like to be involved in the follow up study. One left their employment in-between responding to the request and the reviewer contacting them. The cell phone number given to the reviewer did not appear to be functional and the reviewer was unable to contact this person.

Of the seven who were interviewed, three had attended the Christchurch Risk Management course and four had attended the Auckland course.

Two were teachers and involved in outdoor education in their schools; two were leaders in uniform groups, and one of them was doing this as part of the Outdoor Leader Award; one worked in an organisation taking youth at risk into outdoor environments; one was just starting a job as a tour guide, and one was a year 12 student who is interested in pursuing a career in the outdoors.

Three of the seven participants from the Bushcraft courses agreed to take part in the follow-up study. One had attended the Taranaki Bushcraft course and the other two had participated in the Tauranga Bushcraft course. Two had undertaken the course as they wanted to develop their own skills in the bush and the third person wanted to up-date their skills and knowledge as they teach bushcraft skills to primary age students.

4.2 The limits of this study

As with all self-selecting groups it is difficult to know why some people volunteer for a study and others do not. At least two of the participants from the initial study who did not respond had planned to go overseas not long after the 2010 courses. The Christchurch earthquake may have impacted on the ability of some to respond. It is unknown why the others did not respond. It must be noted that the people interviewed for this study were overwhelmingly positive about their experience on their respective MSC courses and their ability to apply what they had learnt on the course. Those that chose not to participate in this study may have done so because their experience of the course may have been less positive or they may feel they have had less success at applying the course content in their own practices. These are questions that the reviewer was unable to answer in this study.

It is not possible to make any assessment of the generalizability of the findings in this study to other Basic Bushcraft and Risk Management courses. Some confidence can be drawn from the fact that all of the participants in this study report that their learning experiences on MSC courses were positive, they each were able to identify specific things they took from the course and also were each able to give examples of how they now apply that in their own practice in the outdoors. All of the findings in this study are based on self-reports of learning and changes of practice. It is not possible within the scope of this study to verify these self-reports through observation of behaviour or through reviews of documentation supporting programmes.

5. Findings

The findings are organised around the terms of reference for this report. This initial section provides an overview of the findings, illustrated with comments from the participants. The discussion section summarises the findings linked to the relevant section of the outcomes model and discusses these in relation to the literature.

5.1 Do participants feel they are now safer due to their training?

- All training attendees reported feeling more confident in the outdoors now and could all identify specific changes in practices and / or attitudes due to the course.
- Training attendees described an increased level of awareness in their roles. This included an increased level of vigilance in their planning and their practice and a greater understanding of their leadership role.
- The ability to communicate clearly within organisations, with other leaders and with participants was identified by training attendees as an important component of their current safety practices.

All of those interviewed said they felt more confident about being in the outdoors or about taking groups into the outdoors. They could all identify either some very specific changes in their practice or ways in which they now approach being in the outdoors differently. Six people said the main thing they took from the course was the realisation they needed to be more vigilant. This pertained particularly to the participants from the Risk Management courses. As one of the participants said;

“The main thing I took away [from the Risk Management course] is to be more aware. I guess for me, I just didn’t think. Before I did the course I took it all quite laid back and then once I did the course it really woke me up to reality and the possibilities of what can happen and how easily and nasty”.

The thing that contributed the most to this increased awareness was the stories the instructors and other course participants shared about their experiences in the outdoors. All of those that took part in the Risk Management courses commented about a new realisation of how quickly things can go wrong. When asked to provide specific examples of how their practice has changed because of this increased vigilance three described a change in approach to completing Risk Management forms. One of the teachers said;

“I’ve done quite a few of those [RAMS forms] in the past. The stories of what can go wrong if you don’t think about it before you get out there. You can’t just get someone else’s RAMS form and copy and paste it. If you are going into be part of that trip then you have to know what is on that form and what you will do if something does go wrong...Others at the school say, just get the one from last year, you’ll be right. But now that I’ve done that course, I do, no I’ll do it properly. It means I figure it out in my head”.

Four of the participants identified the lemons model as the main thing they took from the course. One described how she had recently been in an assistant leadership role and this allowed her to step back a little and observe how the ‘lemons’ can build up. The person who worked as a tour guide also referred to the concept of the lemons. In the Risk Management course she did, the instructor used the *Cold, Wet and Alive* video to introduce the lemons concept:

“The video was very impressive – of the canoe trip – the lemon principle. That a lot of things can lead to a disaster and that you have to make yourself aware of everything

through the whole process and then you have to make a decision and communicate that decision”.

Two of the participants said the main thing they got out of the course was a better understanding of risk methodology. Both of these two had quite extensive personal experience in the outdoors and were leading groups in the outdoors. One said that having an understanding of:

“the different types of risk – when we run events having a methodology to work through to prepare the RAMS form and the risk management plan”.

An example he gave where this greater understanding changed his practice was the need to plan for children with medical conditions and managing their medication.

Alongside the realisation of what can go wrong and how quickly it can go wrong, was a realisation that ‘I am in charge’. Three of the participants talked about how they started to think about being in the outdoors much more from a leader’s perspective. One of the women on the Bushcraft course said she approaches the preparation for a trip quite differently now. She said:

“For me it is about being more aware when you go tramping. Generally it’s been the male who has taken the lead, where this [the women’s Bushcraft course] gave me the opportunity to realise if I was going to be the one organising a trip then I needed to plan it more thoroughly and look at the capabilities of everyone in the group”.

She then went on to relate an experience about a trip that was beyond the capability of one member of the party. She said now she asks many more questions about people’s skills and experience when planning a trip. For one of the teachers, an increased awareness of her leadership role led to her changing her timetable so she no longer had a heavy day of teaching before leaving for a trip in the afternoon and for ensuring that there was a supervision structure in place that was clearly understood by the other leaders.

The year 12 student also said that main thing that she took from the Risk Management course was the management aspects and having to consider other people, whereas up until that point she had only thought about herself when in the outdoors.

The need for clear communication in groups came through in five of the interviews. Two described now leaving much clearer information in the office about the trip they are on, who is on the trip, their expected return time and what to do if they do not return by then. One of these two also said she now communicated roles and responsibilities to the other leaders on the trip much more clearly. This pertained particularly to supervision structures and ensuring leaders understood when they were expected to actively supervise and when they could have some down time.

Three participants talked about the need to be clear about the key messages they wanted to communicate to a group, how best to chunk up information and to deliver it to the group they are working with.

One of the women on the bushcraft course said watching how the instructor broke down information and delivered it as it was relevant to the group made her relook at her own teaching programme. She said:

“because of the length of time I have with students I am trying to get across what is really important...the good learning thing for me was to break things up and make it relevant”.

This reflects a realisation that safety includes interactions with the group, not just those things like planning and RAMS, for example, that happen behind the scene.

For this person, the Bushcraft course confirmed her knowledge of the practical skills. She had done a bushcraft course in 1987 and had consistently worked and recreated in the outdoors since then and was confident in her skills. The other two Bushcraft participants interviewed both said they gained a range of practical skills. For one it was map and compass skills. The other described it as:

“it [the course] wrapped a whole bunch of general thinking into some core principles”.

5.1.1 Do participants feel more confident in the outdoors?

- Increased confidence allowed training attendees to focus more on their students / participants and the places they were in.

All of the people interviewed spoke about feeling more confident about being in the outdoors. One said:

“I feel a lot more at peace, I guess. Before this [outside contractors] was something my manager had overlooked. We were relying on the external organisations to come in and lead the trip and we didn’t really worry about it. We had overlooked that we needed to do these things too. We’re covering the bases really”.

This confidence seem to come from an increased vigilance and feeling they had much greater awareness both of what could go wrong and how they could manage the situation if something did go wrong.

One of the bushcraft participants gave an example of a day trip he did with his own children:

“One example, we went up a track and were coming back down another when my eldest son tripped and fell very heavily on his knee and got a deep gash. There was no drama because I had my first aid kit and I had it under control...It made me feel good because my kids could see me carrying around a whole bunch of stuff and they could suddenly see why I was doing that, it was a good example”.

Later in the same interview he described going for a walk by himself, stopping for lunch at the highpoint of the track and realising that if something were to happen he had everything he needed to spend a night out and look after himself. He realised at that point that this allowed him to enjoy the place he was in much more as he was not worrying if he was going to be alright.

The increasing feeling of confidence in the outdoors, which in effect allowed the participants to relax and focus on the group they were with, or the environment they were in, seems to be connected to an increased vigilance and greater preparation and planning.

5.1.2 Applying what was learnt on the course

- The applied nature of courses, examples and shared experiences were identified as facilitating understanding and the application of course material into personal practice.

All of the participants were asked how easy they found it to apply what they had learnt on their respective courses to their own practice. The year 12 student was the only person who could not give specific examples of how she applied what she had learnt on the course. This was mainly due to not being in situations where she was planning trips or leading groups. She is currently undertaking work experience at an outdoor centre and said she could see how they used many of the ideas from the Risk Management course in their day to day practice.

All of the others interviewed were in situations where they were planning trips and leading activities. They all found the application of the things they learnt straightforward because they brought a range of experiences with them and could relate what they were learning on the course to their own situation. When asked what helped them to apply what they had learnt all of the risk management participants and one of the bushcraft participants talked about the examples the instructors and the other groups members shared and the role plays in the risk management courses. One participant said:

“it was easy for me to apply because I was passionate about it. I got to practice skills [on the course] and I get to talk to others with lots of experience [contract instructors] about what I am doing. I can ask the ‘what would you do in this situation?’... I personally am quite good at asking questions – but if I wasn’t then maybe I wouldn’t have asked as many questions related to my job”.

Another said the reference material given on the Risk Management course has been really useful in applying the concepts and developing the risk management processes in his situation:

“Referring to that [handouts] consolidates what you gained on the course over time. The handouts were really important and the booklet [the participants were given a workbook on this Risk Management course]”.

While they said that they could relate what they were doing on the course to their own situation, the risk management participants said it would also have been useful to have one or two short activities that allowed them to link the skills or concepts they were learning to their own situation.

Most commented that they remember feeling like a lot of material was covered over the two days. One said:

“it [Risk Management] was a pretty jam packed weekend and I found it quite hard to stay awake – I found that hard going”.

5.2 Is MSC training high quality education / training?

- All training attendees thought the instructors were excellent and the way they shared their extensive experience enhanced the learning experience.
- Participants felt confident they had understood the material covered in the courses, but also noted they had some difficulty remembering all of the things that had been covered in the courses.

All of the participants said the courses they attended were excellent. The instructors were very knowledgeable, the courses were well organised and they liked the variety of approaches taken and the level of practical content in the course. One of the Bushcraft participants said the thing that helped him learn was:

“the method – the hands on. I have to learn hands-on. I can’t just hear it. I’m a tactile learner...His [the instructor’s] style was very much what I like. He would explain it, demonstrate it and then we would do it”.

He went on to say that he valued having done the course because he felt it gave him a baseline of good habits from which to develop.

A number of those interviewed did comment, when asked about the main things that they had learnt, that they could not detail what had actually been covered in the course. As one said:

“The fact that I can’t actually remember anything that was in it now. After the course I thought about the things we did for about a week or so. But now I’ve ticked that box – I can’t really think what did I actually get out of it”.

This may be partly due to the course having been six months prior to the interviews. While a number of the participants made comments in this vein, all of them could give very clear examples of how they continued to apply particular ideas or skills they had acquired through the course.

Three of the participants noted that they found the Risk Management course they attended a “bit easy”. Two thought this might be because they were already familiar with many of the concepts and tools through their work and reasonably extensive personal histories in outdoor recreation. Another had anticipated they would be put in more demanding situations in some of the scenarios. By this they were not referring to more risky situations, but rather greater demands would be put on them to deal with the situations in scenarios.

5.2.1 Feedback and review

- More review and feedback would aid learning.

When asked if they felt confident they had understood the skills or concepts covered in the course they all said that they did feel confident they had understood the material.

One of the Bushcraft participants said the instructor:

“gave us time so everyone understood before we moved off. There was a big mix of skills in the group. She gave us time and worked with us individually as we needed it”.

Some of the participants could identify specific feedback they had received about their learning. In the Risk Management courses the feedback was usually associated with the scenarios. One described one of the scenarios where:

“there was me and two others running it and it was a female that got stuck and I was the only female running it and I didn’t even think that it should have been me [to go to her assistance] because I’m the only girl and she’s a girl. When the instructor said that, it was oh yeah, that so makes sense, but in the moment I didn’t think about it”.

When asked if more feedback and review processes would have aided in learning most agreed that it would be helpful. One of the Bushcraft participants commented that it would have been good to come back to revisit some of the navigation material. She thought her learning would have been aided by looking at navigation in a little more detail on the pre-overnight tramp evening. Another person commented that it would be good to get a

“chance to test yourself, to make sure you know the right answers. When the instructor is asking for feedback from a group it is very easy to sit back if you don’t know the answer.”

Another thought that it would be a very good idea to have some review activities that allowed people to check their understanding.

“Absolutely, it puts you under pressure a little bit, I think you are learning better and you think quite sharp and get feedback. And if you do it in little groups so it doesn’t take too long and not everyone has to listen to everything”

While there was some general agreement that review processes and more feedback would aid learning there was also a strong sentiment expressed that these courses were about giving people the confidence to be in the outdoors. As one person said:

“I think you don’t want to put people off, ‘oh, I didn’t pass that I can’t go walking in the bush’. The whole idea is to get them confident in the outdoors and they need to get out and experience things. And if they don’t pass a test it will put them off. It would be better to say to people if you have any queries give them a local contact so they can get in touch with someone to talk about it”.

One person said that any review process should not be about putting people on the 'spot' or singling them out as that got in the way of the learning. Another person commented that one of the things that made the course such a good learning experience was that "I felt accepted by the group and encouraged and I felt what I had done was okay".

Three people said they would value a refresher to help them review what they had learnt. Two said that this could be in written format or on-line as making time over a weekend or evening was challenging, particularly if it involved having to travel. A third said it would have been wonderful to do a day navigation course about a month after the Bushcraft course to consolidate what she had learnt. She was now looking to do another Bushcraft course. Another person from the Bushcraft course was planning on doing further courses as he saw the initial one as an opportunity to find out what he didn't know and what else he needed to learn.

One person said it would have been very helpful to her if she had been able to leave the Risk Management course with a checklist of questions she needed to ask and things she needed to cover when planning a trip. She said as she was just starting out working with groups in the outdoors, a checklist would have given her some confidence that she had covered all of the areas she needed too.

6. Discussion

The following discussions summarises the findings in relation to the relevant aspect of the outcomes model and the literature introduced earlier in this report.

6.1 Do MSC training attendees feel that they are now safer due to their training?

All but one of the people interviewed in this study said they felt safer in the outdoors due to their MSC training. The one that did not think she felt safer was already very experienced in the outdoors and she said the course confirmed her skills and knowledge and made her re-examine her teaching practices.

6.1.1 Trainees aware of safety messages

The participants in this study all reported having a greater understanding of safety. This was articulated in a number of ways. The most common was an increased awareness of what could go wrong and heightened vigilance associated with that. Both the need for planning and the 'lemons' model were identified as key safety messages taken from the courses. As noted in the 2010 report, all of the instructors were clearly able to articulate the key messages they wanted to get across to participants and while all of the messages were associated with safety, there was variability across these messages. Interestingly, it was an approach or attitude to being in the outdoors that participants most strongly felt they took from this course rather than a specific skill or tool.

As many of the participants observed, a lot of material was covered in the courses, particularly in the Risk Management courses, so it may not be surprising that they found it difficult to bring this down to a few key points.

This raises the question of the safety messages MSC is trying to make course attendees aware of. Another question this raises is if indeed it should be just safety messages that MSC is focusing on, or is part of the message that being in the outdoors safely requires a certain approach or awareness, above and beyond that which key messages can provide? The adult education literature suggests that transference occurs when participants have understood a concept, rather than just rote learnt a message. One way to interpret the findings of this study is to suggest that these participants left the courses with an understanding of the concepts hence describe their subsequent practice in such general terms as increased vigilance, rather than naming specific theories and tools they were introduced to.

6.1.2 Trainees understand safety messages

The comments of the participants in this study suggest that their understanding of safety in the outdoors has increased. Certainly during the Risk Management courses there were numerous comments made by participants that they had not realised the extent of their responsibilities. When asked, all said they felt confident they understood the material they had covered during the course. This needs to be tempered in two respects. One is the quantity of material covered in both the Bushcraft and Risk Management courses that a number of participants said they struggled with. Participants could describe some aspects from the courses they felt confident they had understood. But as a number said, they could no longer identify the specifics of what had been covered in the course they attended so may not have been aware of what they did not understand or had forgotten in the interim.

The second respect in which this high self-reporting of confidence in understanding the material in the courses needs to be tempered is the extent to which they were able to check or test their understanding of safety messages. In the Risk Management courses the scenarios were identified as the site where participants received feedback on their understanding. In the Bushcraft course participants identified points throughout the course where feedback was given. As noted in the findings section, a number of the participants would have valued more opportunities to review and consolidate their learning and to receive a greater amount of constructive feedback on their progress. As one person pointed out, as much of the review that did occur took place in the large group it was quite easy for people to take a back seat.

Reflection and review are central to sense making that leads to understanding. This is linked to formative assessment that works to identify future learning goals and is accompanied by meaningful feedback. There is a lot of material covered in both the Bushcraft and Risk Management courses.

It would seem unrealistic to expect participants to fully understand all the material covered. But it is not unrealistic for participants to have some understanding of areas they might need to develop further.

Three people commented that short refreshers would be useful. Another would have liked to have left the course with a checklist so she was confident she had asked all of the questions she needed to ask in planning a trip. Yet another participant in this study identified the reference material as sufficient for developing his understanding as this allowed him to apply it to his needs as the situation arose.

The assessment focus in this section has deliberately been on formative assessment. While two participants did comment that it would have been good to be put under more pressure, the positive learning atmosphere in the courses was valued by participants. As one person pointed out, by failing a test people may think they cannot go into the outdoors. The aim of formative assessment is looking ahead to learning that will happen in the future, which may be more appropriate given that adult learners tend to be self-directed and are looking to gain understanding they can apply rather than to rote learning a skill.

6.1.3 Trainees fully apply safety messages to themselves

All but the year 12 student could give specific examples of how they applied what they had learnt on their respective courses. This primarily referred to the content material covered, but it also included a realisation about the need to reflect on how best to deliver a safety message. Three of the participants in this study spoke about identifying key messages they wanted to get across and how best to deliver those messages. The participants reported that they had found it relatively easy to apply what they had learnt in their own context. For some this was because the organisation already had in place systems compatible with those they learnt about on the Risk Management course. Two had managers who were supportive of them bringing in changes to the systems to enable clearer communication. Two of the Bushcraft participants could give some specific examples of experiences that reinforced the value of what was learnt on the course. As noted in the discussion and supported by the adult education literature, the participants are motivated and passionate about being in the outdoors, they are self-directed learners who already had a wealth of experience and many of the questions they asked were around “how do I relate this to my situation?”

There was, however, a desire to have more opportunities to reflect on how a concept or tool works in an individual’s particular context. There is scope within MSC courses to ask participants to complete some short activities prior to a course, helping them to gauge their level of understanding at that point and also to identify some key questions or skills they would like addressed during the course. This is consistent with formative assessment where students are involved in identifying their own learning goals.

Given that learning does carry on after an event there is also scope to review the reference material given to participants to ensure it can support that on-going learning and application, developing some short refresher activities that participants can engage in and promoting MSC courses that will enable participants to review and extend their learning. Given the experiences of this group the focus of this should be both on the safety message itself, and on communicating safety message as the majority of people in the courses observed in the 2010 study were in positions where they were leading groups in the outdoors.

One area that deserves further investigation is that of assessment. In the 2010 report a case was made that assessment would both give participants feedback and a greater understanding of their level of skills and competence, and it would provide MSC with evidence to support the claims made about the outcomes of their programmes. The participants in this course were of the view that increased feedback and opportunities to test their knowledge in line with formative assessment practices would have enhanced their learning experiences. At the same time it was felt to be important that the positive learning environment they experienced on the courses be retained and that tests or summative forms of assessment may work against that. This creates a challenge for MSC as the evidence that tends to be recognised as supporting claims about outcomes tends to be in the form of summative assessment.

6.1.4 Trainees know their limits and seek further knowledge and skills - where necessary

Seven of the participants were either in the process of, or planning to seek further skills and knowledge. This included work experience, further MSC courses or completing the Outdoor Leader qualification. As noted above the participants in this study were very motivated and self-directed in identifying their learning needs. Robust formative assessment processes could aid participants to more clearly identify their future learning needs in relation to the specific context in which they operate in the outdoors.

6.2 Is MSC training high quality education / training?

Everyone interviewed in this study commented that they thought the course they attended was excellent, even though three participants noted they found the course a little easy. They appreciated the skill and experience level of the instructors and the opportunity to interact with others with similar interests or who were working in similar contexts.

6.2.1 Appropriate education / training channels identified for audiences and topics

All of the participants valued the opportunity to share experiences with others on the courses. One participant commented that it had been a shame that it was such a small group in her course as it limited the range of experiences within the group and therefore the range of discussion. The findings from the 2010 study and this study suggest that

face-to-face training should remain at the heart of MSC practice, but there is scope to utilise other channels for training.

These might be particularly useful for pre-course activities and post-course revision. As noted by two participants some form of on-line revision or refresher would have been a welcome addition to their learning experience. A component of this that might be worth exploring is an on-line repository of the reference material from the courses so up to date versions of this material is easily accessible for people to utilise as they need too.

6.2.2 Appropriate education / training methods identified

All of the participants appreciated the 'real life' contexts in which the courses occurred, even though for two participants on the Risk Management courses the travel to the venue had presented a significant challenge. The scenario base of the Risk Management course was valued as it not only gave participants a chance to try out some skills, but it was the primary source of feedback. The quantity of material covered and the limited time to revisit crucial skills and knowledge was raised by participants in both the Bushcraft and the Risk Management courses. As noted in the 2010 report, it is timely to review the Risk Management course in particular, due to recent inquiries and the Department of Labour review. This should include a review of the key information participants require and how to most effectively communicate this so participants are not leaving with such a sense of being overloaded with information.

6.2.3 Quality trainers / instructors and Courses delivered well with appropriate content to meet trainees' needs

All of the participants appreciated the skills and experience of the instructors. When asked if the instructors could have done anything differently to enhance learning, participants could not think of anything until they were prompted with specific questions around review and feedback from the reviewer. Given that most of the participants interviewed in this study are leading groups or teaching in outdoor contexts there is scope to explore an instructional focus both on the skills and tools being introduced, but also on how to deliver key ideas and messages when working with groups. This may be more relevant for participants on the Risk Management courses as the majority attending the courses observed in 2010 were there because they were leading groups in the outdoors. While this is a secondary consideration in a course that has already been identified as having a great deal of content, making learning and teaching processes more visible may well be an outcome of including more formative assessment, which is about making learning visible.

7. Conclusion

MSC training attendees interviewed in this study did feel safer due to their training. They could all identify some changes in the way they think about their outdoor practice now and most could give very specific examples of how their practice has changed. This overwhelmingly positive assessment

needs to be tempered with an awareness that participants also had difficulty recalling specific content that had been covered on the course, particularly in relation to Risk Management. While they were confident in their knowledge of what they had retained, it is unclear to what extent they had forgotten material covered and only one person described how he referred back to the reference material as he needed.

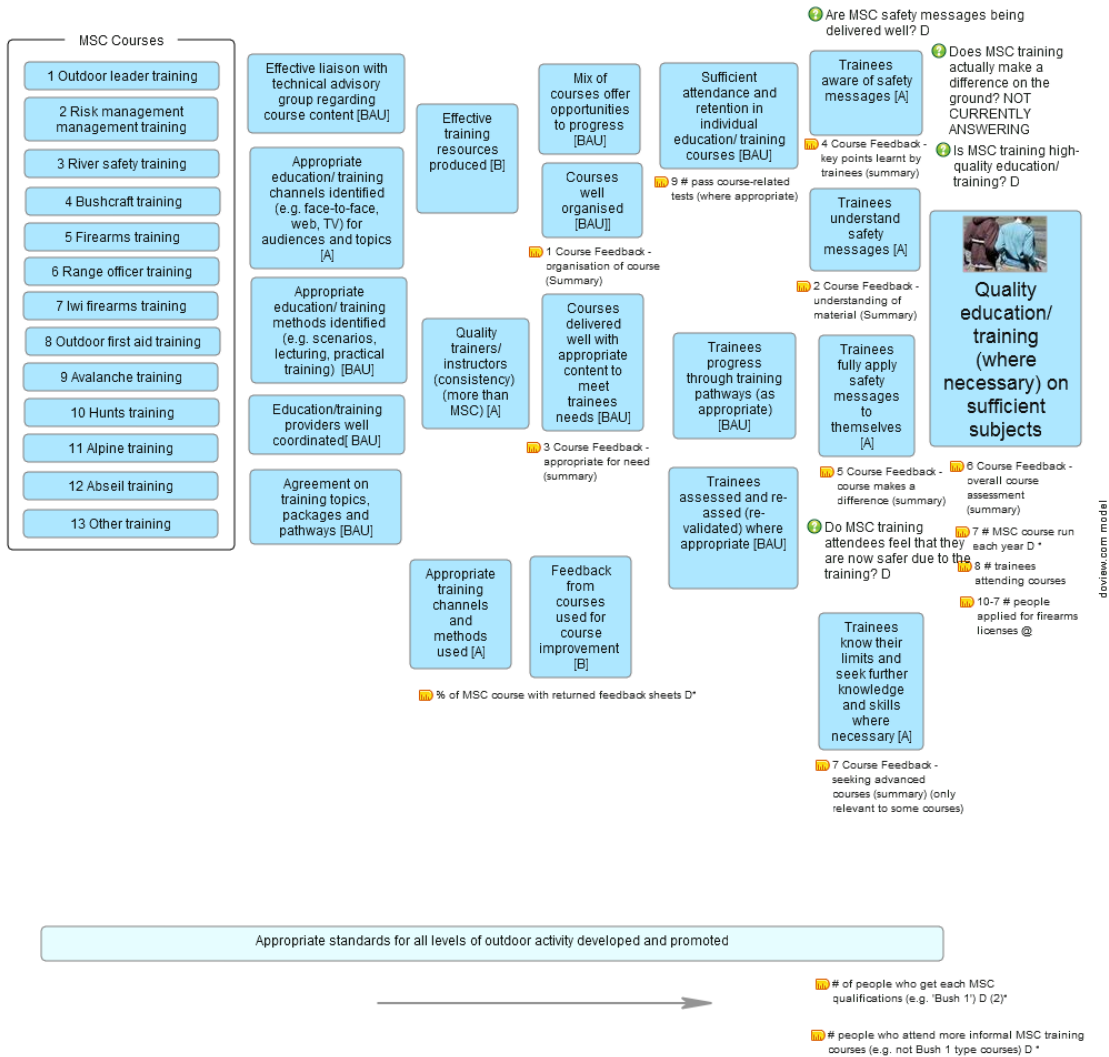
The participants in this study were all very appreciative of the skills and experience of the instructors. While they did not think that the instructors could have done anything differently, when prompted a number did say they would have appreciated more feedback to allow them to gauge their understanding. There is scope to introduce more formative assessment into the courses. This would require some professional development opportunities for instructors as to enable them to do this effectively. The instructors that ran the courses in the 2010 study were all interested in developing their teaching knowledge as well as their content knowledge.

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Appendix One

Outcomes model: Quality education / training (where necessary) on sufficient subjects.



[Duignan's Visual Strategic Planning Approach for more information see <http://tinyurl.com/otheory287> paul@parkerduignan.com]

Appendix Two

Letter sent requesting participants for the follow-up study by Annie Dignan.

Hi Everyone

We hope that you found time to enjoy the outdoors over summer and put into practice some of the things you learnt on your MSC Risk Management or Bushcraft course late last year. You may remember that Robyn Zink was reviewing some of the MSC programmes for us at the time. The report she wrote as part of that review has identified a number of things that MSC can do to improve the courses we offer.

We are now doing a small follow-up study based on Robyn's initial report. As part of this we would like to have a phone conversation with you about what, if anything, from these courses, has been useful and how you have used some of the things you may have learnt. Robyn is again doing this part of the project. This conversation should take no more than 15 minutes. This will help us to get a better understanding of what key messages and skills people take from courses and how useful those messages and skills are in their own outdoor activities.

We would love you to be a part of this follow up evaluation project but need your permission to pass on your contact details to Robyn.

If you are happy to be contacted by Robyn please reply to this email. We will then pass on your contact details to her and she will arrange a time that is convenient for you to talk about the MSC course you did last year. This will happen in the latter half of April.

MSC would very much appreciate you taking part in this follow up evaluation project and thank you in advance for your participation. Remember, all you need to do at this stage is push reply and agree to sharing your contact details with the evaluator Robyn Zink.

Regards

Annie

Appendix Three

Interview Schedule

These questions guided the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured so followed the lead of the participant rather than following this schedule exactly, but all of the themes in these questions were touched on in the interviews.

1. Which course did you do and why
2. What is the main thing you took from the course
3. How confident were you that you understood the skills / knowledge the instructor was trying to get across
4. Did the instructor give you any feedback on how well they thought you understood something? Would that have been useful?
5. How easy was it to apply some of the things you learnt on the course to what do you?
6. What were some of the things you did on the course that helped you apply what you did?
7. What else could the instructor have done to help you remember things or to apply them to your own situation?